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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the relationship of students' attitudes toward evaluation of a modular program in Foundations of Education sponsored by the College of Education of the University of Maine at Orono. A 71-item questionnaire eliciting attitudes toward the modular program, faculty members, and method of instruction was administered. Eighty-five randomly selected students enrolled in a module completed the questionnaire anonymously. Students felt that their ratings would have little effect on the teachers' departmental status or advancement. Students who tended to be more positive toward evaluation tended to have a higher grade point average than did those in the middle or lower range. Students with less positive attitudes toward student evaluations were more supportive of the standard course structure, while students with more positive attitudes were more supportive of the ideas that other colleges on the Orono campus ought to adopt the modular approach. Results are compared to the findings of Costin, Greenough, and Menges (1971) relating to the students' attitudes toward evaluation. (SW)

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Abstract

Student evaluation of both program and faculty is becoming an integral part of higher education policy. Evaluations may be employed to improve teaching and to evaluate programs as well as aid administrators in making decisions on promotion and tenure. The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship of students' attitude toward evaluation of a modular program in Foundations of Education sponsored by the College of Education of the University of Maine at Orono, Maine. The vehicle considered to be the best method for the evaluation was a seventy-one item questionnaire. The results reflect a variety of conclusions. The differences may be derived from the type of institution, the program of studies, and the type of student. This can be considered a step toward additional research in other institutions and contexts.

Student Evaluation of Faculty Performance

Student evaluation of faculty performance and, in truth, any type of evaluation in any area of endeavor has been an item of great controversy. In a great majority of the situations, if not in all of the situations, evaluation has been considered to be an impossible and undesired activity. However, on the collegiate level, student evaluation of both program and faculty increasingly is becoming an integral part of college and university policy (Zuckerman et al. 1978). These evaluations are employed not only to aid faculty improve their teaching and to evaluate programs but also to provide the bases upon which administrators may make decisions on promotion and tenure.

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Previous studies have located and identified a number of variables which should be considered when assessing student ratings of instruction. The more salient variables to be assessed are grade point average (Levin 1978), gender (Marini and Greenberger 1978), college class (Cohen and Berger 1970), and time of evaluation (Hyman 1974). In surveying specific programs offered by the faculty of the College of Education, University of Maine, Drummond (1977) also demonstrated that there are differences in ratings by level of preparation. College students preparing for teaching in primary grades, middle grades, junior high school, or high school tend to rate the same course experiences differently and by different standards.

A very limited number of studies have been completed on how students feel about the concept of evaluation. Costin, Greenough, and Menges (1971) employed a nine item scale to assess attitudes toward evaluation. Their study found no significant correlation between the student's responses to items and grade point average nor between their responses and college year. They concluded that students do not equate teaching with entertainment, are not deliberately easy on teachers, rate independently of gossip, tended not to think ratings were a waste of time, and were willing to spend time outside of class to make such ratings. Costin, et al, suggests that additional research be undertaken employing the variable of students' attitude toward evaluation. The purpose of the cited study was to determine the relationship of students' attitude toward evaluation of a modular program in Foundations of Education sponsored by the College of Education of the University of Maine at Orono, Maine.

Method

A seventy-one item questionnaire elicitating attitudes toward the modular program, attitudes toward student evaluation of faculty, methods of instruction, and evaluation of their current modular instructor was administered at the end of the third modular period in the spring session of 1977. A random sample of 85 or one-third of the students enrolled in a module identified as relating to the teaching process were selected for the study and completed the questionnaire anonymously (Fox et al. 1966). Thirty-six (36%) percent were male and sixty-four (64%) percent were female. Thirty-nine (39%) percent were enrolled in the College of Education, thirty-six (36%) percent from the College of Arts and Sciences, and twenty-two (22%) percent from the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture. Forty-nine (49%) percent intended to teach in the elementary school; and, fifty-one (51%) percent intended to teach in the secondary school. Forty-seven (47%) percent were seniors, twenty-nine (29%) percent juniors, nineteen (19%) percent sophomores, and five (5%) percent unclassified. The scores on the attitude items toward evaluation were summed and the groups were divided into three groups (Flanagan 1969). The groups were the upper quartile, the middle range and the lower quartile, and crosstabs ran on the item responses of the attitude toward evaluation scale.

Results

Table 1 shows the distribution of responses for the items dealing with attitudes toward evaluation. Only slightly over a quarter of the students felt their ratings would affect the professors' future teaching performance (Thurston 1978). Approximately twelve (12%) percent agreed that their ratings would affect the professors' departmental status or advancement. A quarter

of the students viewed ratings as a waste of time although two-fifths of them would be willing to spend time outside of class to rate courses. Fifteen (15%) percent reported they rated a professor higher than he deserved since there are so few professors who excel at teaching. Approximately fifty (50%) percent of the group agreed to some extent that they rated the modular approach higher since they would desire to see more experimentation and innovation taking place in the College of Education. About a third thought their ratings corresponded with those of the rest of the class.

Analysis of the crosstabs by attitude toward evaluation identified three of the items other than those dealing with the evaluating scale as having significant chi squares. There were differences in the group according to reported grade point averages of the respondents (χ^2 13.65, $p <$ .05 6 d.f.). The students who tended to be more positive toward evaluation tended to have higher grade point averages than those in the middle or lower range. A χ^2 of 17.30 ($\rho < .05$, 8d.f.) was computed for the item: The modules required less work and effort from the student than the standard semester course. Students who had more positive attitudes toward evaluation tended to disagree while students with less positive attitudes agreed. The same pattern was true on the item: The traditional course approach would allow the student to accomplish his objectives as well as the modular approach ($\chi^2 = 22.60, \rho <$ 8d.f.). Students with less positive attitudes toward student evaluations were more supportive of the standard course structure. Students with more positive attitudes were more supportive to the idea that other colleges on the Orono campus ought to adopt the modular approach ($\chi^2 = 22.60. \rho < .05$, 8d.f.). Seventy-three (73%) percent of the high group agreed to fifty (50%) percent for the middle group and thirty-eight (38%) percent of the lower group.

Discussion

The study tends to support some of the findings of Costin, Greenough, and Menges (1971) relating to the students' attitude toward evaluation. Students in both cases felt that their ratings would have little affect on the teachers' departmental status or advancement (Randhawa et al. 1973). They both also indicate students belie the notion that they are "easy" in rating their instructors. About the same percentage of students in both studies reported they would be willing to spend time outside of class to rate instructors.

Fewer modular students feel that their ratings will affect the professors' future teaching performance than the University of Illinois group and were less positive in general toward rating.

There were indications that there was a relationship between grade point average and attitude toward ratings.

The results also indicate that in evaluating the attitude of students toward a new program in a department the Hawthorne effect might tend to inflate the positive response to the program (Slavin 1977). Students with more positive attitudes toward student evaluation of instruction tended to be more supportive of the modular approach, those less positive of the standard semester approach.

Partly the differences may reflect the type of institution, the program of studies, as well as the type of students.

Additional research should be conducted investigating attitude of student evaluation of faculty in other institutions and contexts. If a student evaluation of instruction is to be effective, however, students will have to feel that their ratings are meaningful and not a waste of time.

Table 1

Students' Opinions Concerning Student Rating of Instructors

	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Student rating of teachers' performance will affect their future teaching performance.	4.76	22.61	36.90	25.00	10.71
2.	Student ratings will affect most teachers' departmental status or advancement.	2.35	9.41	38.82	27.05	22.35
3.	Ratings are a waste of time.	11.76	14.11	27.05	35.29	11.76
4.	I would like to be able to rate each module.	25.88	36.47	12.94	16.47	8.23
5.	I would be willing to spend time outside of class to rate courses.	10.71	30.95	20.23	17.85	20.23
6.	My ratings usually agree with those of the rest of the class.	4.70	31.76	55.29	5.88	2.35
7.	I generally rate a professor higher than he deserves, since there are so few good professors.	4.81	10.84	26.50	36.14	21.68
8.	I tend to rate the modular approach higher since I would like to see more experimentation and innovation taking place in the College of Education.	14.28	34.52	22.61	22.61	5.95

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